NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5762 APRIL 26, 1978
BUI TUAN

THAI-CAMBODIAN RAPPROCHEMENT: LITTLE PROGRESS

ANNCR:

THAILAND HAS FOR SOME TIME SOUGHT TO MEND ITS DIPLOMATIC FENCES WITH NEIGHBORING CAMBODIA, BUT WITH LITTLE SUCCESS. VOA'S BUI TUAN HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

EARLIER THIS MONTH, CAMBODIA FREED FIVE THAI FISHERMAN WHO WERE TAKEN PRISONER SEVERAL MONTHS AGO WHEN THEIR VESSEL VENTURED INTO CAMBODIAN WATERS. IN ANNOUNCING THEIR RELEASE, RADIO PHNOM PENH SAID THE ACTION BY THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT PAVED THE WAY FOR FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH THAILAND. BUT THE FACT IS THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES HAS GONE FROM BAD TO WORSE IN THE THREE YEARS SINCE THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN CAMBODIA.

THAI OFFICIALS SAY THAT FIFTY THAI FISHERMEN ARE STILL BEING HELD AT A LABOR CAMP IN KOMPONGSOM PROVINCE IN CAMBODIA AND THAT PHNOM PENH REFUSES TO SAY WHEN THEY WILL BE RELEASED. THE RESUMPTION OF BORDER TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IS ALSO STILL UNSETTLED. CAMBODIA HAS INDICATED ITS READINESS TO RESUME TRADE TIES THROUGH KOH SADECH ISLAND. AND BANGKOK IS SEEKING A BARTER TRADING ARRANGEMENT BECAU-E OF THE LACK OF CURRENCY IN CAMBODIA.

THERE'S ALSO THE QUESTION OF CAMBODIA'S PARTICIPATING IN THE MEKONG RIVER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. THAILAND, LAOS AND VIETNAM HAVE JOINED THE RECONSTITUTED MEKONG RIVER COMMITTEE AND HAVE CALLED UPON CAMBODIA TO RENEW ITS MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMITTEE. IN ADDITION, CAMDODIA AND THAILAND MUST SOONER OR LATER AGREE ON A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE DEMOCRATION LINE FOR THE

CONTINENTAL SHELF AND THE ECONOMIC ZONE IN THE GULF OF THAILAND. THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN FURTHER COMPLICATED BY CAMDODIA'S RECENT DECISION TO EXTEND ITS FISHING ZONE TO TWO HUNDRED MILES.

BUT CERTAINLY THE BIGGEST STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE RESUMPTION OF NORMAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA IS THE RECURRENT ARMED CLASHES ALONG THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER. THAI FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT PACHARIANGKUN RECENTLY TRAVELLED TO PHNOM PENH TO DISCUSS WITH CAMBODIAN LEADERS WAYS OF HALTING THE BORDER INCIDENTS. THS JOINT COMMUNIQUE ENDING HIS VISIT REFERRED TO A SO-CALLED "THIRD PARTY" WHICH WAS ACCUSED OF ATTEMPTING TO UNDERMINE THAI-CAMBODIAN RELATIONS. HOWEVER, THE TWO GOVERNMENTS IDENTITY THIS "THIRD PARTY" DIFFERENTLY. THE THAIS REFER TO THE SOME 1,000 THAI COMMUNIST TERRORISTS OPERATING ALONG THE THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER FROM SANCTUARIES IN CAMBODIA. THE INSURGENTS, BANGKOK CLAIMS, HAVE INTRUDED INTO THAILAND, ATTACKING BORDER POSTS AND KIDNAPPING HUNDREDS OF THAI VILLAGERS.

THE "THIRD PARTY," ACCORDING TO PHNOM PENH, ARE ANTI-GOVERNMENT CAMBODIANS REPORTEDLY STILL ACTIVE IN THE BORDER AREA. THAI OFFICIALS SAY THAT THE MOVEMENT IS BEING SPEARHEADED BY CAMBODIAN REFUGEES, AND THEY DENY THAT THE DISSIDENTS HAVE RECEIVED SUPPORT SUPPORT FROM THAILAND.

JS/PY